Transcript of Speech by Chuck Schumer on March 14, 2024

I rise to speak today about what I believe can- and should-be the path forward to secure mutual peace and lasting prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians.

I speak for myself, but I also speak for so many mainstream Jewish Americans - a silent majority - whose nuanced views on the matter have never been well represented in this country's discussions about the war in Gaza.

My last name is Schumer, which derives from the Hebrew word Shomer, or "guardian." Of course, my first responsibility is to America and New York. But as the first Jewish Majority Leader of the United States Senate, and the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in America ever, I also feel very keenly my responsibility as Shomer Yisroel - a guardian of the People of Israel.

Throughout Jewish history, there have been many Shomrim, and plenty who were far greater than I claim to be. But nonetheless, this is the position in which I find myself now - at a time of great difficulty for the State of Israel, for the Jewish people, and for non-Jewish friends of Israel. So I feel an immense obligation to speak and act.

I speak as a member of a community of Jewish Americans that I know very well. They are my family, my friends. Many of them are my constituents, many of them are Democrats and many are deeply concerned about the pursuit of justice, both in New York and around the globe. From the Talmud - Tikkun Olam, the call to "repair the world" - has driven Jews around the globe to do what is right.

We love Israel in our bones. What Israel has meant to my generation, within living memory of the Holocaust, is impossible to measure. The flowering of the Jewish people in the desert from the ashes of the Holocaust, and the fulfillment of the dream of a Jewish homeland - after nearly two thousand years of praying and waiting - represents one of the most heartfelt causes of my life.

And unlike some younger Americans, I remember how hard it was to achieve that dream. I remember clutching my transistor radio to my ear in James Madison High School during the Six Day War wondering if Israel would be pushed into the sea.

If the events of the last few months have made anything clear, it is that Israel is surrounded by vicious enemies, and there are many people around the world who excuse and even support their aims to expel and kill Jews living in their hard-won land of refuge.

I will never underestimate the grave threats Israel faces - and has faced for the entirety of its existence, nor will I ever underestimate the oppression that the Jewish people have endured for millennia.

It is precisely out of this long-standing connection to, and concern for, the State of Israel and its people that I speak today about what I view are the most pressing existential threats to Israel's long-term peace and prosperity.

After five months of suffering on both sides of this conflict, our thinking must turn - urgently- to how we can achieve lasting peace, and ensure prosperity and security for both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people in the Middle East.

I believe that to achieve that lasting peace - which we so long for - Israel must make some significant course corrections, which I will outline in this speech.

But first, let's not forget how we arrived at this critical moment.

What Hamas did on October 7 was brutal beyond imagination. I have sat with the families of those killed in the assault. I have seen the footage and heard the stories of innocents murdered and raped in heartless cruelty. As long as I live, I will never forget these images - this pure and premeditated evil.

Many of my family members were killed by Nazis in the Holocaust. October 7 and the shameless response to support that terrorist attack by some in America and around the globe have awakened the deepest fears of the Jewish people - that our annihilation remains a possibility.

Today, over 130 hostages remain captive in Gaza. I am anguished by the plight of so many hostages still trapped deep inside Hamas's network of tunnels. I pray for them, and for their families, who have inspired me with their tenacious advocacy to ensure their loved ones are not forgotten.

Many of them are Americans: Jonathan Dekel Chen, Hersch Goldberg Polin; and some are my constituents in New York: Omer Neutra, Keith Siegel and Itay Chen, who we tragically learned this week was brutally killed on October 7 while serving near the Gaza border. Hamas still holds his body, as well as those of Americans Judi Weinstein and Gad Haggai.

I have sat with many of these families and I have wept with them. Each day that their loved ones don't come home carries enough anguish and grief to last a lifetime.

I am working in every way I can to support the Biden Administration as negotiations continue to free every last one of the hostages. I urge every actor at the table - the Israelis, the Biden Administration, the Qataris, the Egyptians, and anybody else at the table-to continue doing everything possible to get to a deal. Hamas has been given a deal already. They should say yes. There is no time to waste.

My heart also breaks at the loss of so many civilian lives in Gaza. I am anguished that the Israeli war campaign has killed so many innocent Palestinians. I know that my fellow Jewish Americans feel this same anguish when they see the images of dead and starving children and destroyed homes.

Gaza is experiencing a humanitarian catastrophe - entire families wiped out, whole neighborhoods reduced to rubble, mass displacement, children suffering.

We should not let the complexities of this conflict stop us from stating the plain truth: Palestinian civilians do not deserve to suffer for the sins of Hamas, and Israel has a moral obligation to do better. The United States has an obligation to do better.

I believe the United States must provide robust humanitarian aid to Gaza, and pressure the Israelis to let more of it get through to the people who need it.

Jewish people throughout the centuries have empathized with those who are suffering and who are oppressed because we have known so much of that ourselves. As the Torah teaches us, every human life is precious, and every single innocent life lost, whether Israeli or Palestinian, is a tragedy that as Scripture says, "destroys an entire world."

What horrifies so many Jews especially is our sense that Israel is falling short of upholding these distinctly Jewish values that we hold so dear. We must be better than our enemies, lest we become them.

Israel has a fundamental right to defend itself, but as I have said from the beginning of this war - how it exercises that right matters.

Israel must prioritize the protection of civilian casualties when identifying military targets. I have repeatedly called upon the Israeli government to do so.

But it must also be said that Israel is by no means the only one responsible for the immense civilian toll. To blame only Israel for the deaths of Palestinians is unfair, one-sided and deliberately manipulative - and it ignores Hamas's role in this conflict.

Hamas has knowingly invited an immense civilian toll during this war. Their goal on October 7 was to provoke a tough response from Israel by killing as many Jews as possible in the most vicious manner possible - by raping women, executing babies, desecrating bodies, brutalizing whole communities.

Since then, Hamas has heartlessly hidden behind their fellow Palestinians by turning hospitals into command centers, and refugee camps into missile-launching sites. It is well documented that Hamas soldiers use innocent Gazans as human shields. The leaders of Hamas, many of whom live lives of luxury in places far away from the poverty and misfortune of Gaza, do not care one iota about the Palestinians for whom they claim to nobly fight.

It bothers me deeply that most media outlets covering this war, and many protesters opposing it, have placed the blame for civilian casualties entirely on Israel. All too often, in the media and at protests, it is never noted that Hamas has gone to great lengths to make themselves inseparable from the civilian population of Gaza by using Palestinians as human shields.

Too many news agencies and newspapers give Hamas a pass by hardly ever discussing this shameful practice that is central to their fighting strategy, and this has led to an inaccurate perception of the harsh realities of this war. I believe stories that justifiably mention the loss of innocent Palestinian life should also note how Hamas uses civilians as human shields. It almost never happens. And I believe that every protest that justifiably decries the loss of innocent Palestinian men, women and children, should also denounce Hamas for their central role in the bloodshed.

When protesters decry the loss of Palestinian life, but never condemn this perfidy or the loss of Israeli lives, it confounds and deeply troubles the vast majority of Jewish and non-Jewish Americans alike who support the State of Israel.

Given that Hamas launched their attack on October 7 to provoke Israel, given that Hamas sought the ensuing civilian toll in Gaza, given that Hamas wanted both Israelis and Arabs to be at each other's throats... tensions on both sides have dramatically intensified.

And now, as a result of these inflamed tensions in both the Israeli and Palestinian communities, people on all sides of this war are turning away from a two-state solution - including Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who in recent weeks has said out loud repeatedly what many have long suspected by outright rejecting the idea of Palestinian statehood and sovereignty.

As the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in our government, and a staunch defender of Israel, I rise today to say unequivocally: This is a grave mistake. For Israel. For Palestinians. For the region and the world.

The only real and sustainable solution to this decades-old conflict is a negotiated two-state solution - a demilitarized Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel in equal measures of peace, security, prosperity, dignity and mutual recognition.

Both Jews and Palestinians have long historic claims to this land. Contrary to the unfounded, absurd and offensive claims by some that the Jewish people are "colonizers" in their ancestral homeland, Jewish people have lived in the Holy Land continuously for more than three millennia. For centuries, Jews have made aliyah and gone to the land of Israel to live and settle. For centuries, at Passover, Jews at every corner of the globe have prayed, "Next year in Jerusalem."

A Jewish homeland in Israel is no twentieth-century contrivance. Israel is our historic home. A home for people oppressed for centuries.

The Palestinians, too, have lived on the land for generations, and in past centuries, they have formed their own distinct culture, identity, cuisine and literature. The idea espoused by some that "There is no such thing as Palestinians" today is inaccurate, offensive and unhelpful.

The only just solution to this predicament is one in which each people can flourish in their own state side-by-side.

But for a two-state solution to work over the long term, it has to include real and meaningful compromises by both sides.

For example, too many Israelis who say they want a two-state solution don't acknowledge how the amount and extent of expanding settlements render that a virtual impossibility.

And too many Palestinians who say they want a two-state solution don't acknowledge how their insistence on an unequivocal "right of return" is a fatal impediment to progress.

Both ways of thinking are impeding the peace process.

And there are others on the left who view a two-state solution with skepticism as an ideal that will never happen, a far-off goal that allows for the continuation of the status quo in Gaza and the West Bank, where Palestinians face unique obstacles compared to their Israeli counterparts. As a result, they reject a two-state solution in favor of one state, where Palestinians and Israelis would supposedly live in democratic peace side-by-side.

I can understand the idealism that inspires so many young people in particular to support a one-state solution. Why can't we all live side-by-side and house-by-house in peace?

I count at least two reasons why this wouldn't work, and why it is unacceptable to most Jewish people.

First, this combined state could take an extreme turn politically, putting Jewish Israelis in peril. This state would be majority Palestinian, and in the past, some Palestinians have voted to empower groups like Hamas, which seeks to eradicate the Jewish people.

It is longstanding American policy to support democracy overseas, but in this hypothetical single state, democracy could cost Israeli Jews their safety if extremists were to take control of this new state of affairs to ultimately achieve their true aim: the violent expulsion of Jews from the Holy Land.

This is no abstract fear. Thousands of years of Jewish history show that when things go badly, the people of the country in which Jews live - even in a democracy - all too often turn on them as convenient scapegoats. There is no guarantee this wouldn't happen again in a single Israeli-Palestinian state. To have Palestinian voters be the protectors of Israeli Jews would be a bridge too far to accept.

Second, Jews have a right to their own state. It is troubling to me that many people, especially on the left, seem to acknowledge and even celebrate this right to statehood for every group but the Jews. If a national homeland for all peoples of the world has been the driving goal of the anticolonial movement of the last century, then why are only Jews seemingly penalized for this aspiration? Jews have a human right to their own state just as any other people do, Palestinians included.

As I said, there are also some Israelis who oppose even a two-state solution with a demilitarized Palestinian state because they fear that it might tolerate or be a harbor for further terrorism against a Jewish state.

I understand these fears. But the bitter reality is that a single state controlled by Israel, which they advocate, guarantees certain war forever, and further isolation of the Jewish community in the world to the extent that its future would be jeopardized.

Let me elaborate.

They say the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. If Israel were to not only maintain the status quo, but go beyond that and tighten its control over Gaza and the West Bank, as some in the current Netanyahu administration have suggested - in effect creating a de facto single state - then what reasonable expectation can we have that Hamas and their allies will lay down their arms? It would mean constant

On top of that, Israel moving closer to a single state entirely under its control would further rupture its relationship with the rest of the world, including the United States. Support for Israel has declined worldwide in the last few months, and this trend will only get worse if the Israeli government continues to follow its current path.

I appreciate that so many Israelis cannot contemplate the possibility of two states right now because they remain so traumatized and angry by what Hamas did on October 7. The brutality, the viciousness, the sexual assault, the imprisonment and abuse of hundreds of hostages. I'm of course sympathetic to this point of view. I'm upset and angry, too.

We will never forget what happened on October 7. But even while we carry the anguish in our hearts, we have to think ahead to the future, the medium and long term, and how we can ensure that something like October 7 never happens again. We cannot let anger or trauma determine our actions and cloud our judgment.

A two-state solution may feel daunting, especially now, but I believe it is the only realistic and sustainable solution - on the basis of security, on the basis of prosperity, on the basis of fundamental human rights and dignity.

But in order to achieve a two-state solution, the reality is that things must change. Right now, there are four major obstacles standing in the way of two states, and until they are removed from the equation, there will never be peace in Israel and Gaza and the West Bank.

Those four major obstacles are:

> Hamas, and the Palestinians who support and tolerate their evil ways.
>
> Radical right-wing Israelis in government and society.
>
> Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.
>
> Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
>
> I will explain each in detail.

The first major obstacle to peace is Hamas, and the Palestinians who support and tolerate their evil ways.

Hamas is for the destruction of Israel, and in past decades, it has undermined any hope for peace at every turn. It was Hamas who began its vicious campaign of suicide bombings against innocent Israelis to derail the nascent peace process in Oslo. It was Hamas who assassinated more moderate Palestinian political representatives in Gaza in 2007. It is Hamas who has held Gaza under repressive, undemocratic rule for close to two decades. And it is Hamas who has targeted those brave Gazans who have spoken out against its actions or tried to bridge the divide between Israelis and Palestinians.

Jewish Americans and Israelis alike have been appalled and hurt at efforts to rebrand Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a terrorist organization, as noble resistance or freedom fighters. Attempts to excuse their horrific actions against both Israelis and Palestinians are morally repugnant.

A permanent ceasefire, effective immediately, would only allow Hamas to regroup and launch further attacks on Israeli civilians. There can never be a two-state solution if Hamas has any significant power.

However, a temporary ceasefire, such as President Biden has proposed, which would allow for the return of hostages and humanitarian relief for suffering Palestinians, is quite different, and is something I support. But any proposal that leaves Hamas with meaningful power is unacceptable to me and most all Israelis.

It should go without saying that Hamas cannot have any role in a future Gaza if we are to achieve peace.

The same goes for the minority of Palestinians who support Hamas and those who demonstrate other forms of extremism, even if they're not card-carrying members. The Gazans who ventured into Israeli territory on October 7 to loot and pillage. The people in the West Bank who flooded the streets and cheered from afar the cold-blooded killing of mothers and children.

This is appalling behavior, and while it may fall short of terrorism, it has no place in a peaceful future for Israel and Palestinians, and it ought to be denounced by the Palestinian public and their leaders who believe in a more sustainable future beyond the cycle of violent revenge.

The second major obstacle to peace is radical right-wing Israelis in government and society.

The worst examples of this radicalism are Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Ministry of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir.

Minister Smotrich has in the past openly called for the subjugation or forced displacement of all Palestinians in the West Bank. In the current crisis, he has used inflammatory rhetoric and called for punitive restrictions on Palestinian farmers in the West Bank during the olive harvest. He has prevented the transfer of funds to the Palestinian Authority, and he has opposed the provision of any humanitarian assistance to Gaza, going so far as to stop agreed-upon shipments of flour.

Minister Ben Gvir is no better. When he was a young man, he was barred from Israeli military service for his extremist views. Last year, in a move only intended to antagonize the Muslim population, he visited the Temple Mount with his supporters as a brazen show of force towards Palestinians. And during this current conflict, he has facilitated the mass distribution of guns to far-right settlers, exacerbating instability and fueling violence.

There is a nastiness to what Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir believe and how they use their positions of authority and influence; an eagerness to inflame and provoke that is profoundly irresponsible and self-destructive.

In my conversations with Israeli leaders, I have urged them to do more to clamp down on the unacceptable vigilante settler violence in the West Bank, and I have supported the Biden administration's efforts to impose consequences for extremist settler violence. But the unfortunate reality is that this violence is openly supported by Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir, and as long as they hold their positions of power, no true progress will be made.

While not equivalent, extremist Palestinians and extremist Israelis seek the same goal: from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, they aim to push the other from the land.

Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir may not say they want to kill all Palestinians outright, but they are clear in their desire to displace them from their homes and replace them with Israeli settlers.

This is also abhorrent. As long as these two hold their positions of power, peace will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

The third major obstacle to peace is the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, who is beholden to his narrow political interests, to the detriment of both the West Bank and Gaza.

Over the years, President Abbas has evaded the democratic process, declining to hold elections for over a decade and failing to empower future leadership. Despite his long tenure leading the Palestinian Authority, he has achieved few of his self-proclaimed goals. The Palestinian Authority remains corrupt and continues to incite instability through the martyr payment system. Palestinians are no more prosperous, no safer, and no freer than they were when Abbas first took power. As a result, President Abbas has lost the trust of the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, he is a terrible role model and spiritual leader. In the past, he has participated in outright Holocaust denial, attempting to justify Nazis' actions. This embrace of antisemitism extended to his refusal, for weeks, to condemn the loss of Israeli civilian life on October 7. Should Abbas remain, the Palestinian people can have no assurance that a Palestinian state would be able to ensure their safety or prosperity. Nor can they have any belief that the government would be free of corruption.

For there to be any hope of peace in the future, Abbas must step down and be replaced by a new generation of Palestinian leaders who will work towards attaining peace with a Jewish State. Otherwise, the West Bank will continue to suffer, and Hamas - or some similarly extreme organization - will continue to maintain a foothold in Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority under new leadership must undertake a reform process and emerge as a revitalized PA that can viably serve as the basis for a Palestinian State with the trust of the Palestinian people.

The fourth major obstacle to peace is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has all too frequently bowed to the demands of extremists like Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir, and the settlers in the West Bank.

I have known Prime Minister Netanyahu for a long time. While we have vehemently disagreed on many occasions, I will always respect his extraordinary bravery for Israel on the battlefield as a younger man. I believe in his heart his highest priority is the security of Israel.

However, I also believe Prime Minister Netanyahu has lost his way by allowing his political survival to take precedence over the best interests of Israel.

He has put himself in coalition with far-right extremists like Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir, and as a result, he has been too willing to tolerate the civilian toll in Gaza, which is pushing support for Israel worldwide to historic lows. Israel cannot survive if it becomes a pariah.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has also weakened Israel's political and moral fabric through his attempts to co-opt the judiciary. And he has shown zero interest in doing the courageous and visionary work required to pave the way for peace, even before this present conflict.

As a lifelong supporter of Israel, it has become clear to me:

The Netanyahu coalition no longer fits the needs of Israel after October 7. The world has changed - radically since then, and the Israeli people are being stifled right now by a governing vision that is stuck in the past.

Nobody expects Prime Minister Netanyahu to do the things that must be done to break the cycle of violence, preserve Israel's credibility on the world stage, and work towards a two-state solution.

If he were to disavow Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir, and kick them out of his governing coalition, that would be a real meaningful step forward.

But regrettably, there is no reason to believe Prime Minister Netanyahu would do that.

He won't disavow Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir and their calls for Israelis to drive Palestinians out of Gaza and the West Bank. He won't commit to a military operation in Rafah that prioritizes protecting civilian life. He won't engage responsibly in discussions about a "day-after" plan for Gaza, and a longer-term pathway to peace.

Hamas, and the Palestinians who support and tolerate their evil ways.

Radical right-wing Israelis in government and society.

President Abbas.

Prime Minister Netanyahu.

These are the four obstacles to peace, and if we fail to overcome them, then Israel and the West Bank and Gaza will be trapped in the same violent state of affairs they've experienced for the last 75 years.

These obstacles are not the same in their culpability for the present state of affairs. But arguing over which is the worst stymies our ability to achieve peace.

Given the complexity and gravity of this undertaking, many different groups have a responsibility to see it through.

The Palestinian people must reject Hamas and the extremism in their midst. They know better than anybody how Hamas has used them as pawns, how Hamas has tortured and punished Palestinians who seek peace.

Quite frankly, I haven't heard enough Palestinian leaders express anguish about Hamas and other extreme elements of Palestinian society. I implore them to speak up now, even when it may be hardest. Because that is the only true way to honor the lives of all those lost - by transcending the enmity and bloodshed, and working together in good faith for a better future.

Once Hamas is deprived of power, the Palestinians will be much freer to choose a government they want and deserve. With the prospect of a real two-state solution on the table, and for the first time, genuine statehood for the Palestinian people, I believe they will be far more likely to support more mainstream leaders committed to peace.

I think the same is true of the Israeli people. Call me an optimist, but I believe that if the Israeli public is presented with a path to a two-state solution that offers a chance at lasting peace and coexistence, then most mainstream Israelis will moderate their views and support it.

Part of that moderation must include rejecting right-wing zealots like Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir, and the extremist Israeli settlers in the West Bank. These people do not represent a majority of the Israeli public, yet under Prime Minister Netanyahu's watch, they have had far too much influence.

All sides must reject "From the river to the sea" thinking - and I believe they will if the prospects for peace and a two-state solution are real.

Beyond the Israeli and Palestinian people and their leaders, there are others who bear a serious responsibility to work towards a two-state solution. Without them, it cannot succeed.

Middle Eastern powers like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab

Emirates, Egypt, Jordan and other mainstream Arab states can have immense power and influence with the Palestinians. Working with the United States, they must responsibly deploy their clout, their money and their diplomacy to support a new demilitarized Palestinian state that rejects terror and violence. I believe they have the leverage to do this with the support of the majority of the Palestinian people, who want what any other people want: peace, security and prosperity.

I believe there is enough strength in the Arab world to get President Abbas to step down, and to support a gradual succession plan for responsible Palestinian leaders to take his place. Hamas has so wrecked society in Gaza that it will take the outside involvement of Arab countries to help rebuild something better and more sustainable. It may take some time to identify such leaders, but with the considerable resources of the Arab world backing them, I believe these leaders can and will emerge knowing that they have support.

The outlines of the deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel that were reported before October 7 still make a great deal of sense, and can be the catalyst for the creation of a viable Palestinian state. Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations should continue to pursue normalization with Israel, and this should be the foundation of a grand bargain in the Middle East that will finally make meaningful Palestinian statehood a reality.

For our part, the United States - the world's superpower - must work together with our allies to bring our immense diplomatic and financial power to bear on this situation. We can be a partner to a grand bargain in the Middle East by deepening our relationship with the Saudis and other Arab nations to induce them to make a deal - but only if they actively guide Palestinians toward a more peaceful future.

On the Israeli side, the US government should demand that Israel conduct itself with a future two-state solution in mind. We should not be forced into a position of unequivocally supporting the actions of an Israeli government that includes bigots who reject the idea of a Palestinian state.

Israel is a democracy.

Five months into this conflict, it is clear that Israelis need to take stock of the situation and ask: must we change course?

At this critical juncture, I believe a new election is the only way to allow for a healthy and open decision-making process about the future of Israel, at a time when so many Israelis have lost their confidence in the vision and direction of their government.

I also believe a majority of the Israeli public will recognize the need for change, and I believe that holding a new election once the war starts to wind down would give Israelis an opportunity to express their vision for the post-war future.

Of course, the United States cannot dictate the outcome of an election, nor should we try. That is for the Israeli public to decide - a public that I believe understands better than anybody that Israel cannot hope to succeed as a pariah opposed by the rest of the world.

As a democracy, Israel has the right to choose its own leaders, and we should let the chips fall where they may. But the important thing is that Israelis are given a choice. There needs to be a fresh debate about the future of Israel after October 7.

In my opinion, that is best accomplished by holding an election.

If Prime Minister Netanyahu's current coalition remains in power after the war begins to wind down, and continues to pursue dangerous and inflammatory policies that test existing US standards for assistance, then the United States will have no choice but to play a more active role in shaping Israeli policy by using our leverage to change the present course.

The United States' bond with Israel is unbreakable, but if extremists continue to unduly influence Israeli policy, then the Administration should use the tools at its disposal to make sure our support for Israel is aligned with our broader goal of achieving long-term peace and stability in the region.

I believe this would make a lasting two-state solution more likely.

Now, I know there are many on both sides who question how we can discuss peace at a moment like this.

So many Gazans are displaced from their homes and struggling to meet their most basic needs. Many are still burying and mourning their dead. Entire families have been wiped out.

In Israel, everyone knows someone who was killed on October 7. So many Israelis feel that people around the world have no respect for the grief and rage unleashed by Hamas's vicious attack.

So is there real hope for peace and a two-state solution?

In the face of this atrocity, who could blame even the most hopeful among us for hardening their hearts, for giving up on the possibility of peace, for giving in to hate?

I seek my inspiration in the example of leaders who have come before us and worked for peace in the face of extreme circumstances.

Some of Israel's greatest warriors and security experts have been staunch advocates for peace because they understand better than anybody that it is essential to Israel's security.

David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak... all of them sought peace with the Palestinians.

On the Palestinian side, we don't have to look back very far to see a model of responsible leadership - Salam Fayyad, the former prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, who was clear in his condemnation of violence against Israelis.

And for the Arab leaders of today, may they find inspiration in Anwar El-Sadat of Egypt and King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan, who had the courage and vision to seek peace with Israel.

Before October 7, things were moving in the right direction. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia both were on the path to normalization with Israel, and with conditions that would greatly benefit the lives of the Palestinian people. Many believe that Iran motivated Hamas to disrupt this process, and indeed there have been setbacks since October 7, but recent talks between Arab and American leaders suggest the desire is stronger than ever now to find a path forward. Arab leaders cannot lose their stomachs for peace now at this critical inflection point. They must continue to pursue the path to normalization of relations with Israel, and the US should use all of its power and influence to bring them to the table and make them cooperate constructively.

If my speaking out today has any effect, it will probably have greater influence on the Israeli and Jewish side of things, but if this conflict is to be resolved, we need comparable Palestinian and Arab leaders to also speak responsibly to their people about the path forward to peace.

Now is the time for courageous leadership.

After Israelis and Palestinians have experienced so much horror and loss of life, to not have something meaningful come out of this war would be doubly tragic.

History will look back on what we do here. Are we prepared together to have the courage to make an all-out push to bring about peace, once and for all? To bring to this conflict what the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called the "fierce urgency of now" to end the cycles of tragedy and pain?

I have always said when horrific things happen, some turn inwards and let their grief consume them, while others light a candle and turn their grief into power. They are able to see hope in the darkness.

In Scripture, we read about how God created the world from an infinite void - that out of the greatest darkness can come the greatest light. I hope and pray that from the brutal slaying of Israelis by Hamas, and the harrowing civilian toll in Gaza, that a two-state solution where Jews and Palestinians can live in peace will prevail.I know I am not alone in this prayer.

There are right now Palestinians in Gaza, some of whom are still pulling dead family members from the rubble, who are defying Hamas and their murderous ideology and calling for a pathway to peace.

There are right now some families of the victims of October 7 who have been calling for peace, asking their government to transcend the cycle of bloodshed and revenge.

If they can find in their hearts a path to peace, then surely we can also.

From the ashes, may we light the candles that lead us to a better future for all.